

A Conversation on Bioethics

With Rebecca Westbrook

TRAVIS: All right, everybody. Welcome back to the Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Here again, as always, with Wes McAdams. Hi, Wes.

WES: Hey, Brother. How are you?

TRAVIS: I'm good. How are you?

WES: Good. I'm doing great.

TRAVIS: So we've got this episode coming out that we're going to introduce.

WES: Yes. So we're going to play a conversation that I had with one of our members here at McDermott Road. Her name is Rebecca Westbrook, and the topic of that conversation is going to be IVF, in vitro fertilization, and, particularly, adoption of fertilized -- or adoption of embryos that have been frozen, and sort of the ethics around that and some of the things Christians might want to think about and talk about as it pertains to that specific conversation.

But I wanted to do this introduction -- and we may do another episode along with this one at some other time. We're sort of interrupting our series on "What Does This Passage Mean" to talk about this bioethics and the human body, and right now this is incredibly relevant. I don't know when this podcast will be published, but right now, as a country, we're talking a lot about abortion, because, hopefully, *Roe vs. Wade* might be overturned here

in the next month or so. It's looking like that's going to be the case, which will ultimately mean, in practical terms, that a lot of states will be able to ban abortion or outlaw abortion so that there are less abortions. It won't ban abortion across the board. There will still be states, I'm sure, where it continues to be legal, and so we'll continue to have these conversations, but this has been brought to the surface.

But it's also part of a larger conversation just about bioethics. And when we say "bio," we mean biology, specifically human biology, and "ethics" as in how do we make good and right decisions about human biology or that relate to human biology. But that's a complicated topic, and so I wanted to introduce this conversation that I had with Rebecca about embryos -- frozen embryos, but also to sort of introduce, more broadly, this topic and conversation of bioethics and give people just sort of a framework for working with that.

I think when we talk about human biology, as Christians, we have a unique perspective. We have a unique narrative given to us by scripture. And you and I talk all the time about how the Bible is a story, and it's a story that helps us to know who we really are and what our life on earth is all about and what is the future of life on earth. What is the future of life? What is life? All of these questions -- the Bible, the story of scripture, helps us to answer those questions; otherwise, we're depending on other narratives, and there are plenty of other narratives and there always were. The Bible was always one narrative against and competing with other narratives. And so the Bible was written in the context of other polytheistic narratives, other narratives about the world and about life and about humanity, but no story of

humanity gives human beings the kind of dignity that the biblical story gives. That's one of the things that I think is the best apologetic for Christianity. One is the empty tomb of Jesus; and two is the fact that the Bible gives more dignity and respect to all human persons than any other narrative that it competes with.

But when we talk about humanity, like what is a human, that is a good question, and it's one that we don't often stop to think about and talk about. We talk about biology and bioethics. These are incredibly important things, and I think we have to talk about it at least in two ways. I like to think about the beauty and the brokenness -- because I like alliteration -- the beauty and the brokenness of creation. So on the one hand, there's the beauty of creation; and on the other hand, there's the brokenness of creation, and all of this is laid out and introduced in the first three chapters of the Bible. I like to say everything you need to know you learn in Genesis 1 through 3. If you don't get that part, then you really don't get the rest of it. And then, even as you begin to learn the rest of it, it always points back to and it's always relating back to Genesis 1 through 3. In fact, that's why Revelation ends the way that it does, because it sums up this whole big-picture story of the Bible by pointing us back to the garden and talking about the redemption of that broken story.

So on the one hand, we have the beauty of creation. We have, specifically, as we talk about human biology, that the human body is good. It's beautiful. It is who we are. So sort of with that in mind, let's -- I'm going to have you read Genesis 1, and if you would, read 26 through 31 for us. And, again, every time Jesus or the apostles talk about sexuality or

gender or how to live and interact with each other, so many times it points back to these principles that we glean from Genesis 1:26-31, so if you would, read that for us.

TRAVIS: Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.' So God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.' Then God said, 'Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food, and I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground, everything that has life.' And that is what happened. Then God looked over all that he had made and he saw that it was very good. And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day."

WES: Awesome. And, again, all throughout that narrative of Genesis 1, God says, "It's good. It's good. It's good." And after he creates human beings, the pinnacle of his creation, he says, "It's very good." And humanity is created in -- and I like the way that your Bible reads that. Verse 26 of the English Standard Version, it says, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." But the idea there is, "Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness." So human beings in our wholeness, and that includes everything that we are: our bodies, our minds, our thinking, our feeling, our creativity,

everything that we are, not just what we do.

And so often I think that we change this or we interpret this as being humans are God's image-bearers in "what we do," but this puts it in terms of "this is who we are." Even if you can't do anything, even if you can't think, you are -- if you are a human, you are an image-bearer of God. If you can't move, you are still an image-bearer of God because you are human. And so this sets the stage for gender; this sets the stage for sexuality; this sets the stage for the value and dignity of human life. All human life is made to be an image of, a reflection of, the glory and the likeness of God in our totality, in our wholeness. Now, with that sort of as one piece of the puzzle, if you would, read Genesis 2:5-7 for us, and that's sort of another piece of the puzzle.

TRAVIS: Genesis 2:5: "Neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth, for the Lord God had not yet sent rain to water the earth and there were no people to cultivate the soil. Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person."

WES: Interesting. So that's the New Living Translation, I guess.

TRAVIS: Yep.

WES: It says, "The man became a living person." The English Standard Version says, "The man became a living creature," and both of those are fine, "person" or "creature." Another -- I like the word "being" because the Hebrew word there is "nephesh," which is the word we typically translate as "soul." The man became a living soul, a living being, a living person. And

that's what we have to realize, is that "soul," in the biblical narrative -- now, this isn't true in the philosophical narrative. In the secular philosophies of the world, the competing narratives -- and it's always been this way. The competing narratives have tried to create a dualism where human beings have a body and a soul, and human philosophy tends to try to separate those things and create a disparity between those things, where we say, "Well, you have your body over here, but you have your spirit, or your soul, over here." Well, in the biblical narrative, there's a wholeness, there's a connectivity, an inseparability to it, almost. That's not to say that we can't survive the death of our bodies. We can. But that's not the way God intends for it to be. He intends for us to be a whole being.

And so in the biblical narrative, the soul, the *nephesh*, is the whole person. So a soul isn't something we have; a soul is something we are. In our totality, a human being is a living soul. That includes his body, and so my body is part of my soul. And I think that even just saying that reveals the very big difference between the Christian narrative and every other narrative. And, in fact, so much of what we disagree about in culture, whether that's ethnicity, whether that's gender, whether that's sexuality, whether that's abortion, whether that's what we do with frozen embryos, whether that's euthanasia, all of this comes down to -- the big term for it would be "anthropological dualism," which is the idea that secular philosophy has always promoted. Even the Gnostics of the first, second, third century really promoted an anthropological dualism, where they looked at the body as being bad. They looked at the physical things as being bad. So often Christians can unintentionally adopt that, and they gather that from

the philosophies of the world. It's a worldly philosophy that is at odds with the Christian narrative, with the biblical narrative.

And if we think back to all of the things that we've done to ourselves and to other humans that are painful and wrong and harmful, so much of it comes back to this. This is why racism existed. This is why the mistreatment of people because of their physical features -- it existed because there was this anthropological dualism. If someone is a human -- if someone is a human, then they are an image-bearer of God.

There were questions for centuries about whether or not people of African descent had a soul. There were entire books written. There were entire philosophies, even religious ideas that promoted the idea that people of African descent didn't have a soul. That is anthropological dualism. That is antithetical to the biblical doctrines. The biblical doctrine says if you are a human, if you are a person, then you are a soul, which has implications for all of these areas. It has implications for, again, gender and sexuality and abortion and euthanasia and even how we treat people that look different from us. It doesn't matter if someone looks different from you. It doesn't matter if someone can do what you can do, if somebody can think how you can think, if somebody is lacking the cognitive ability that you have. We don't say, "Well, someone is less human because they can't think as well as I can think," or "because they have a disability." "They can't walk like I can walk," or "they have this problem or that problem," or "they don't do this like I do, so they're less human than I am."

This sort of dehumanizing and this contemptibility that people have for their own bodies sometimes and the way they mistreat their own body, or

the way they treat their own body as disposable or like it's a playground or like it's usable in whatever way I want to use it and it doesn't really matter because the body doesn't really matter -- or the way we mistreat other human beings, all of it comes back to a rejection of the biblical narrative because the biblical narrative is all about how the creation is good, and the human body, as a part of God's good creation, is good. It has teleological meaning. It points to a purpose, and its purpose is to bring glory to its creator, and the human body is the pinnacle of God's creation and it is good, and we have to learn to treat the human body as something that is good.

Now, that being said -- I know I'm covering a lot of stuff here, but that being said, that the human body is good, and all of the implications that come with that, we also have to acknowledge that there's the beauty of creation, but also the brokenness of creation, that there's a fallenness to creation. That things are good, but they're broken, and there's something in us that points to "It shouldn't be this way. There shouldn't be death. There shouldn't be suffering. There shouldn't be pain," and we're right for feeling that way. The biblical narrative affirms that feeling that we have, that it's not right that children should suffer. It's not right that this should be broken. It's not right that I should feel this way. It's not right that people should die. That's true. That's not the way God intended for his creation to be. But because of sin -- and, again, that's Genesis 3. Because sin comes into the world, fallenness and brokenness come into the world.

So part of compassion and love for one another is trying to alleviate the effects of that brokenness and that fall. And so if you have a broken arm and I -- actually, I would just drive you to the hospital.

TRAVIS: I appreciate that.

WES: I would drive you to the hospital; I wouldn't try to fix your arm. But the fact that your arm breaks, that your arm is frail -- sorry, I should use my arm more than your arm. My arm is far more frail than your arm is. So our bodies have a frailty to them, and they do because of the fall, and so we use any means we can to try to alleviate that pain and suffering. That's what compassion does. That's what the Samaritan did for the Jewish man in Jesus' parable. He took care of him, the one who is suffering the effects of the fall. That's what all of Jesus' miracles do; they alleviate the suffering and the pain of the fall. They bring new creation and healing into the world. And so when we do that, that's good and loving. And science can help us with that, right? I mean, again, we go to the doctor if we're sick, and that's a good thing. But I think, too, if we don't embrace the biblical narrative, we put too much emphasis on science and we assume that science will be our savior. I think it's important for us to recognize that science isn't bad. If science helps us to alleviate pain and suffering and to show compassion to one another, it's good, but it's also not a god. And I think there is a scientism that takes science -- the hope of science to the ultimate degree that says science can solve all of our problems and make everything better. And that, again, is a rejection of the biblical narrative, because the biblical narrative isn't that we escape the human body and it's not that science can fix the human body; it's that Jesus redeems the human body. It's that Jesus redeems creation.

So as we deal with bioethics, we're dealing with fallenness. In our conversation with Rebecca, it's about infertility, and that's the fact that women are infertile, that there are some women who can't have children that

wish to have children. That's a product of the fall, and so it's right and good for us to try to help women that are suffering the effects of the fall. But as we try to help women with that, what repercussions are there and what ethical decisions are there? And then we have to deal with, well, now we have fertilized eggs. We have embryos. We have human embryos. We have human life. If life begins -- if human life begins, as I believe it does, at conception, then we have a human life that's been created. And do we have a womb in which that human life can continue to grow and become a full-grown adult human? And what are we going to do? How are we going to respect that human life that's been created in the meantime?

And so, as science continues to evolve and change, and what we're able to do to help people changes, we also have to deal with the repercussions of that. But I think we always have to remember Romans 8, and that's one of my favorite chapters. We don't have to read that now, but Romans 8 says that Jesus is going to redeem creation. Jesus is going to be the one to fix all of the brokenness. Yes, science can help us in the meantime to sort of patch and mend and help and comfort, but it's going to be Jesus who redeems creation. And as science gives us some opportunities, it also gives us some conundrums and some difficulties, ethical decisions that we're going to have to make.

There's a book that I want to recommend. I haven't finished reading it myself, but so far -- I'm almost done with it, but it's called "Love Thy Body" by Nancy Pearcey, and she talks about a lot of these things that we're talking about. I also did a series here at McDermott Road a while back. I'll try to link to it if I can find it. It was called "Being Human." But I think that we

need this framework about the beauty and the brokenness of creation and, ultimately, the redemption that Jesus is going to bring to the brokenness to help us to deal with, again, gender, sexuality, abortion, ethnicity, race, all of these questions that have come up over the years. How we treat our own body and how we treat the bodies of others, how we think about human beings is so incredibly important.

I think, maybe, just to end this introduction with two questions, if we're going to make a decision that relates to the human body, we've got to ask at least a couple of questions. Two of them might be, does this decision show compassion to those suffering the effects of the fall? And then, secondly, does this decision show respect for the whole human person, including their body, that is an image-bearer of God? That person, in their wholeness -- again, there's no way to draw a line to say, okay, at what point -- from the time an egg is fertilized by sperm, at what point does that become a person? People have tried to draw a line, and that, again, reflects a secular view of humanity, a secular view of the human body, that if this is human, if this is life, if this is human life, then it is an image-bearer of God. And we have to show that kind of respect for the whole human person and recognize that this human person, as is all human persons, are image-bearers of God. And so this conversation with Rebecca, I think, is just one piece of that puzzle, but hopefully this gives people some other food for thought as they think about bioethical conversations.

WES: Today we're going to visit with one of the members here at the

McDermott Road Church of Christ, Rebecca Westbrook, who has experience in this area and who is going to help us to think through some of these things. Rebecca, thank you so much for being with us today.

REBECCA: I appreciate you having me on. This is a subject very close to my heart.

WES: I know it is. I know it is. Well, let's first start with a definition of embryo adoption, because that's the primary thing we're going to talk about today. So what is that, for those who may not be aware?

REBECCA: Okay. So for couples that undergo IVF, or in vitro fertilization, eggs are harvested from the woman and then they are fertilized. The goal from your fertility specialist is to grow them outside of the body, I guess, technically, on a Petri dish. Way back when, they called them test-tube babies. And then, hopefully, from the fertility standpoint, you have some that grow, nowadays, to about five days, and then they will take those that survive and they will do one of two things. They will freeze them and/or they will implant them, with the goal of obviously becoming pregnant. And then from that, depending on how many embryos that are harvested and frozen, if a couple finishes growing their family and have more embryos than they need, one option is to -- and what I obviously encourage, is to give them up for adoption or donation, depending on what you look at. There's some legal terms that say it's just donation, but even the government calls it adoption. And so you would give them to another couple to continue their fertility journey and to hopefully become pregnant with those embryos and have their own children. So that's kind of the -- and there's obviously ways to go about that to give them, as well as the legal aspect. But that's kind of

the basic of what the embryo -- and the embryos are completely genetically complete to become a baby. Okay? These are not just sperm or eggs.

There's everything there to become a baby; it just needs to grow.

WES: Yeah, needs a place to grow.

REBECCA: Yes.

WES: So for context's sake, what's your personal experience with embryo adoption?

REBECCA: Well, we started our fertility journey 10, 12 years ago. Okay? We struggled for roughly four to five years. I am from a medical background. I'm actually a veterinarian. I am a research nerd, so I researched and researched, and I did not want to undergo IVF because one of my largest concerns was that we were going to have leftover embryos, and that me, as a Christian especially, and my personal beliefs, what would I do with these embryos? We did a lot of other things, which a lot of couples do, and I got to be 39, and my newest OB/GYN said, "You're going to have to make decisions if you want children," so we actually took the plunge and did IVF. Generally, past 39, it would actually be fairly rare to have leftover embryos, so at that point, we had our first daughter through IVF. We did not have leftover embryos, and -- but I also knew our chances of having another child were pretty slim.

In the middle of our research for IVF -- and I think, actually, it was probably after we did the IVF, I ran across embryo adoption, and I was like, "Why does nobody talk about this?" We would not have chosen to do IVF -- don't get me wrong; I want my daughter, would not change any of my background. But knowing the risk, I would have -- we would have just

chosen to go ahead and adopt embryos, but nobody's ever heard of it. My fertility doctor never mentioned it. Unless you know to look, this is something you generally would not run across.

And so, as we failed another IVF, we went on a website that allowed us to meet a couple who ended up donating their embryos to us. We were donated 12 embryos. I was 40, 41, in there. Realistically, I knew we were not going to use all these embryos. The couple that gave them to us actually is from outside the country, kind of interestingly, but they did their fertility work in the U.S. The wife was Catholic, and she's a big believer and sacred of life, and she wasn't practicing but she had been raised in the Catholic faith, and her husband was, I think, Buddhist. Okay? So -- and they donated to us, and we ended up using three embryos. And I learned more things as we went along, which we'll probably touch on later, but we were donated three embryos -- or 12, and we used three, and we have two lovely daughters and we have nine more embryos, which then put us on the other side. How do I find a Christian home to donate my embryos to? And these are our embryos in the sense that once they're donated, they're yours and you have the responsibility for them, and they don't go back to the original donor unless there was some sort of contract set up that way. And with that, then we are on the other side of what I did not want to do, which was have embryos to donate. But with it, it gave me the understanding of what the other side is going through and the difficulty of decisions, and how do you meet Christians, and how do you choose, and just the education with that. So that's kind of our story of how we ended up on both sides of the equation.

WES: Well, thank you for sharing that story, and I can't help but think how

many layers of challenge that you had and that so many couples have.

REBECCA: Yes.

WES: On the one hand, you have the challenge of infertility and everything that goes along with the challenge of trying to conceive in the natural way. But then on top of that, then there's the challenge of IVF and the dilemma and the questions, and we'll get to the moral and ethical types of questions that you have on top of all of the medical things and situations that you deal with. And then on top of that, then you have the dilemma of the extra embryos that you want to be able to make sure they go to a good home.

So with all of those things being said, what are some of -- and you've already touched on the fact that, as you reflected on IVF, you had some hesitation there because of your Christianity. So in your mind, especially because this is a Bible study podcast traditionally, what are some of the biblical principles that shape your thinking as it pertains to all of these issues that this includes?

REBECCA: So I would say the biggest one is -- and as it led me down to talking to a lot of my fertility specialists -- was these are complete genetic potential babies. In the past -- or back in the early '70s when they first started doing IVF, nobody thought ahead to the potential issues that could come up. What do you do if you have leftovers? Because at the beginning, there almost never was leftovers. The science wasn't there, and, you know, so your options were -- and I've heard multiple people tell me once you were done, you either paid for freezing forever or you destroyed them. That was it. Or sometimes you'll hear you can donate to medical science, which the reality is that's destroying your embryos. With that, and as time has went on

-- and I was looking at the numbers and just had no clue. The CDC actually comes up with the statistics, and they have the ability to do this, and there's roughly -- I think it was 1.1 million, but they now think there's about 1.4 million frozen embryos. And of those, you look at people that are done, I think about half of those could be available. You know, it's a crazy amount of number.

And as I look at making choices of do you do IVF, do you look at -- you know, do you look at adopting embryos, one of the newer things that, if you're looking toward your fertility -- because not everything leads to IVF. There's a lot of reasons couples have struggles, and a fertility specialist's goal is actually probably not to originally lead you toward IVF. IVF is more last-ditch. But with that, one of the things that was not talked about or even mentioned when I went through this eight years ago is to not use all the medications that make you have a lot more eggs. If you do have all these eggs, I would probably recommend freezing them and only using part of them instead of having all these fertilized. Do them in batches, ones you could actually use, and those are things I would actually talk to your specialist if you are leading -- there's what they call natural cycles, where they only harvest what you make. Best, you would only use what you make if they turn into embryos, so you have zero leftovers, and that's actually the goal if you're working toward IVF versus what I'm running across as I talk to people: "We have eight left over." "We have seven left over," and then you are on the other side, you know, of making those religious -- because if you destroy them, you're basically aborting them. That's really what it's coming down to. My daughters would never have existed if their original donors

had said they don't count, you know, but they do. I look at them every day. My five-year-old and my three-year-old, you know, they're precious souls in God's eyes. They were meant to be here, and I truly do believe that.

WES: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that this is an area that we don't often explore or think about, or a lot of us -- I know I was completely unaware of the implications of this area of medicine. And we talk about abortion and we talk about life beginning at conception, and many of us hold to that point of view because we believe in the sacred nature of life, that people are image-bearers of God. I think about, you know, from the very beginning, the creation account, and I think that, as Christians, so much of our thinking should be rooted in the creation account. When Paul talks about marriage, when Paul talks about sexuality, when Jesus talks about marriage or sexuality, they always go back to the creation account. And even a lot of the laws that were established for Israel and then later, obviously, for Christians were rooted in what we call the Imago Dei, the idea that humans are made as God's image-bearers. Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens."

And so that truth that human beings are image-bearers -- and then we can talk about some of the passages that reflect that the child in the womb is a human being and is a baby and is a child. Then that leads to these natural questions of, well, then, is it right or is it ethical or is it good to take a life when it's in the womb, and so that led to all of these legitimate questions around abortion. But then now we have all of these questions, as you've laid out, around in vitro fertilization and these extra embryos that have been

fertilized. And if we believe that from the moment of conception this is a human being and an image-bearer of God, then how do we treat these embryos with dignity and respect and treat them as sacred?

And as you said, this medical advancement that has allowed for many children to come into the world that wouldn't be in the world has also left a million -- as you said, a million fertilized eggs, a million embryos that have yet to be born, have yet to develop into children and be born into the world. If we believe in the sacredness of life, and if we believe that that life begins at conception, then potentially we have a million babies there, or embryos that will be babies, that have, as you said, all the genetic material and information, then how we treat them and how we help them to find homes and families becomes incredibly moral and ethical and is at the heart of what we believe.

REBECCA: Yeah, it's -- basically, they're souls frozen in stasis. And, you know, you look at them, and just like not every pregnancy comes to term and not every embryo comes to term as a baby, we're looking still at 750,000 embryos frozen in stasis, and each year is roughly a hundred thousand added to be frozen. That doesn't mean they won't be used, but that's what the numbers say from the fertility specialists. And it's such a -- on the opposite side of things, couples that have gone through this and had no expectations or were never counseled, "What are you going to do with the extra embryos" -- because, honestly, you're so desperate to have a baby and a family, that sometimes it's either coated over by your fertility specialist or you don't know the right questions to ask, and then you end up on the other side. And then there comes a stigma. It's very hidden, fertility often is.

We're talking about some that could be given up for adoption or donation are couples that are probably in their 40s and early 50s that the embryos are sitting there.

But then you're like, well, if you bring it up, you know, there's two sides. You know, how do you meet? How do you -- what's the church going to think if you tell people? Are they going to jump onto you? "How could you give them up?" You know, "Can you keep them frozen forever?" Maybe you want to avoid that decision. I've had people tell me, shouldn't I avoid the decision? Shouldn't I just keep them? If I can't birth them, why shouldn't I just leave them frozen? And I think that's shirking my Christian responsibility, and I think God has a plan for them.

I try to look at it -- because it is very emotional on my end. Even though I was not the beginner, didn't bring them in, but my daughters are their siblings, and I look at it as, well, I wrote a will. If I die -- me and my husband die, then I have a plan for my existing children, where they're going to go. I tried to pick a good home, somebody to raise them in the faith. I didn't say, well, I'm going to die and I'm scared, and so I want my living children killed because what if they don't turn out right? What if the people that get them don't raise them in the faith like I planned, you know? Instead, I do my best to have a plan, and that's the same thing I'll do for these embryos that we have. We will pick -- me and my husband will pick a family that we hope raises them in the faith, and gift them, and I think God does have a plan where these souls will go. That's -- when I look at my daughters, I'm like, your soul was planned to be to us. That was God's plan. It was a roundabout plan, but it was a plan, and I think we need to support

those that are struggling with these decisions, to encourage adoption, not abandonment. That's another huge problem. This gets so emotional, sometimes people just quit paying and they abandon the embryos. Technically, most of them -- contracts would be destroyed. A lot of that actually is not happening because the IVF groups are fearful. Social media is pretty ugly, so they just sit on them, so they will stay frozen in stasis forever on the abandonment side, too. I just think there's so much education that needs to be done, both on current IVF, as well as how do we help where we're at.

WES: Yeah. Well, you've touched on so many things.

REBECCA: Sorry.

WES: No, no, it's so good. I wish I could explore all of the different avenues. I think one of the questions that people would have -- you mentioned a soul frozen in stasis, and I think that's exactly right. In fact, I think the way that scripture talks about the human body is that we are a soul, and so I think that that idea of the sacredness of not only life in a theoretical sense, but life in an embodied sense -- and this is the beginning of that body, the genetic information of that body, and so -- but just on a practical level, you mentioned frozen and frozen indefinitely. That's an interesting concept. A child that's born today that was an adopted embryo might have been conceived how long ago? How long might that have been fertilized?

REBECCA: So, technically, as long as they're properly stored, they can be -- because a lot of people think, well, they'll just eventually die; they just won't be good, and that's not how it works. The oldest current -- there's a family that adopted from a donation center, and my suspicion is they just

said, "Give us your oldest embryos." One was a 24-year-old embryo and the other one was 27 years, so they had been frozen that long, and they both -- each was a little girl, perfectly healthy and fine. So yes, they can be frozen, technically -- we've got really good freezing techniques now, but even those really old, not-as-good techniques still can have -- be full-term babies. And it's shocking, and it's -- people -- you know, we think maybe they're only good for a year or two. That's not how it works, which is hard because the Christian aspect and the responsibility, it's pretty overwhelming.

WES: Yeah. And that brings up another question, and that's if somebody just Googles "Is IVF biblical," or "What does the Bible say about IVF," or something along those lines, they'll quickly find that there are a lot of different perspectives.

REBECCA: Correct.

WES: Even from a Christian worldview, from a biblical worldview, there are multiple viewpoints on the ethical and moral implications of in vitro fertilization or what we do with the embryos that have been fertilized.

So from your perspective, what are some of the things that even just a couple who is struggling with infertility right now -- what are some of the questions that they need to be asking themselves to kind of figure out where they are and what their convictions are? What are some of the things that they might not even be considering or questions they might not even be asking.

REBECCA: Sure. So the first thing I would -- depending on once they've talked to a fertility specialist and what their issues are, the first thing I would heavily discuss with them is not doing the large egg and fertilization harvest.

I would heavily talk about either doing what they call, you know, a lower medication that has a lower egg count, or a natural setup, or if you do harvest a bunch of eggs, only using a small number for -- and having them fertilized so you do not have leftovers. That would be the ideally, if you're going to do your own.

I know a lot of people also look at genetic testing. I tried to do a little bit of research now to find out if there was better numbers, but I will tell you the one thing I asked that really blew me away when I was asking my fertility specialist, I said, "Okay. If we test my embryos for genetic diseases and let's say one of my embryos has Down's" -- which I would not -- if I had a natural pregnancy, I would not abort a child with Down syndrome. So I was like, "So what would -- what do we do? What would you do?" And they -- the fertility specialist looked at me, and he goes, "Well, my group" -- not me -- "we would destroy that embryo." And I said, "But what if I want to have the baby?" "Oh, no, our ethics" -- not mine -- "our ethics will not let you have that baby. We're going to destroy anything that we consider genetically deficient, you know, diseased." And there's a couple of issues that come in with that. One, when they genetically test, I did not know five percent are -- you lose five percent of embryos, healthy or unhealthy, so you've already destroyed these, about five percent of them. And the second set is -- it's not a hundred percent. And I'm not saying -- encouraging destruction, but something to keep in mind is there are false positives. You know, there are things that, even if you're a non-Christian, you could still be destroying normal embryos, because one of the things they'll say is, "Even if you do all this, we still want to genetic test you once you are pregnant

because we know it's not a hundred percent. We know it's not infallible."

Now, for a Christian, I'm not God, so I am not going to test or destroy what God has said should grow. I let Him make that decision, and sometimes it's a hard decision. I have known people who have had full-term babies that were not going to survive outside the womb. But I kind of look at it -- for me, personally, if I thought I needed genetic testing, that I had a disease or something that was going to be passed along, then I really needed to be looking outside. I need to be considering general adoption or I need to consider embryo adoption elsewhere, not my own with that. So that's my personal Christian take on that for the choices that I would make.

So if I was now doing what I did then, I would either do -- not harvest as many so we would use up what we had, or I would go straight to embryo adoption or general adoption, but I would not make -- we got lucky. We didn't have leftovers. But the couple who donated to us, she was a statistic anomaly. She was 42. She should have had no embryos left. They started with 16 and had two children and then donated us 12. Okay? So not everything follows the rules. You know, you could be given all the statistics in the world and you're an outlier, and that's something to keep in mind.

WES: And I think in all of these things -- and not just as it pertains to fertility and these sorts of medical questions and the dilemmas that arise because of them -- but in so many of this, I think that one of the questions that Christians ought to ponder is, just because we can, does that mean we should? And I think that the world's perspective has pushed technology along at such breakneck speeds that sometimes they haven't stopped to ask that question, "Should we do this just because we can do this?" But just

because the world hasn't asked that, and maybe even our doctors and people that we're consulting haven't stopped to ask that, doesn't mean that we shouldn't stop and ask, "Is this what's best?" And sometimes it's not a matter of what's sinful and not sinful; sometimes it's a matter of what's wise and what's the best thing to do? So all of this is incredibly complicated stuff, and, Rebecca, I appreciate so very much you sharing your perspective and your experience. I'd love for you to help give couples some resources.

What resources exist to help people to navigate this area?

REBECCA: Sure. So when you're looking at, especially, on -- so for embryo donation, if you're a couple that has more embryos than you could use, whether they were donated to you or they came from IVF or whatever, there's only -- there's a couple different ways. I will tell you, at this point, your doctor would take them. Now that -- as a Christian, I'm not just going to hand them over to somebody, but they will often beg. They sometimes will push. I've had several people say that they have been highly pressured for that.

There is -- I started Embryo Adoption Project, which is basically a matchmaking -- like a dating-type website where you have private profiles on both sides. You have donors and adoptives. I built this because I wanted them to go -- my embryos to go to a Christian home, but I don't necessarily want to have to filter through everybody to find a good match. I wanted to keep my privacy until we were -- we had found a good match with that, and it's free. It's a nonprofit, and that lets us direct -- that's what we call direct donation. I'm going to work directly with the couple. Then we will end up doing lawyer contracts and then they will take over from there.

There are -- there is a Christian -- loosely -- group that you can -- if you could make the decision at all -- and it's better than abandoning or destroying them -- that you can donate them to them. They do have some qualifications for adoptive couples, and you could do that direction. From an adoption standpoint, you could -- of course, we're just getting started, but you can work through and check out the donors on our end. You can work also with this other group because they have embryos that are donated through them to adopt. Now, they also have restrictions, as well, as they do most of the fertility work. I think they're out of Knoxville.

But in my world, even though we have our -- our website, my goal is to save souls. Obviously, I want them in Christian homes, but everybody's different. I'm not going to say mine is the only -- you know, our website is the only way. And, you know, reach out to your counselors and stuff. I know on the donor side this is very emotional. It's also emotional on the adoptive side, and hopefully they can also help guide you with resources. I have a ton of information on my website on how direct donation works. I get real leery when people go on Facebook. I think that's a lot of -- there are donor groups, but there's a lot of crazies out there that are willing to take advantage of both sides emotionally, and so -- you know. And there is a rare few -- I think there is at least one Christian adoption agency that also does a subset of embryo adoption and they will do all the screening for you, if that's more your side, also. So there's kind of like three different ways: Adoption group, donation group, and then websites like what I have, which is, you know, the nonprofit-dating-website style, so...

WES: Fantastic. Well, we will definitely link that in the show notes and let

people check that out if that's something that they want to take advantage of.

Rebecca, thank you so very much --

REBECCA: Oh, you're welcome.

WES: -- for your time today and thanks for what you're doing to make sure these children get good homes.

REBECCA: I appreciate it. You know, we're -- anything I can do to help both donors and adoptives. This is a passion project. I want these embryos frozen in stasis to have a chance at life and to be a blessing.

WES: Yeah. Amen. Well, thank you.

REBECCA: Thank you.

Thank you so much for being part of the Radically Christian Bible Study podcast today. We hope that you've enjoyed this episode. I want to give a special thanks to Travis Pauley and to our McDermott Road church family for making this podcast possible. As always, we love you, God loves you, and we hope that you have a wonderful day.